







# THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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# THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

**I**N the first collected edition of Rabindranath Tagore's poems, issued in 1896 and arranged chronologically, *Vidāya-Abhisāp*—*The Curse at Farewell*—appears immediately after *Sonār Tarī*—*The Golden Boat*. The poems of *Sonār Tarī* fall between the dates 1891 and 1893; so *The Curse at Farewell* presumably belongs to the autumn of 1893, as *Chitrā*<sup>1</sup>, the next book, contains poems dated in this year.

Indian mythology, like Greek and Norse, knows of a giant race who war with the Gods—the Daityas, usually translated 'Demons,' though not wicked in

<sup>1</sup> A volume of lyrics; not the drama published in English as *Chitra*.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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any sense other than that they warred against the Devas or 'Gods.' The fable of *The Curse at Farewell* was taken from the *Mahābhārata*, in which we read that the slain and wounded on the Demons' side were restored by the skill of Sukra (guardian of the planet Venus), the Demons' preceptor. Kacha, son of Bṛhaspati (guardian of the planet Jupiter), the Gods' preceptor, was sent to acquire the healing *mantra* or formula. The rest of the story may be gathered from Tagore's poem.

*The Curse at Farewell* is Tagore's first dramatic poem in rime. He had used blank verse in the earlier dramas, *Nature's Revenge*,<sup>1</sup> *Sacrifice*, and *Chitrāngadā*.<sup>2</sup> His dramas for the last fifteen years have been in prose. But between 1893 and 1904 he produced a number of remarkably fine

<sup>1</sup> Translated as *Sanyasi*.

<sup>2</sup> The English *Chitra*.

## INTRODUCTION

dramatic dialogues in rimed couplets, a medium which he chose in preference to blank verse, because it gave his decorative gifts an opportunity. The surprising thing is that so little dramatic power is lost. The reader will feel the rich, discursive beauty of *The Curse at Farewell*, the fine, open, leisurely landscape-painting and peace; but he will feel also how the verse quickens with passion when Debjāni<sup>1</sup> has failed to get past all the elaborate parrying of Kach—a very skilful presentation—and has to declare herself, in the boldness of her great confidence—“Indra is not your Indra.” Her last two speeches are tense with indignation, especially in her desperate rejection of his request for ‘forgiveness’—“Brahmin, where in my mind will you find forgiveness?”

<sup>1</sup> From this point I keep the Bengali forms Debjāni for Devayāni, and Kach for Kacha.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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It is not a translator's business to point out the merits of the poem he has translated. These his translation should show. But the reader unfamiliar with Indian thought may easily miss the most remarkable feature of *The Curse at Farewell*, its Janus-face toward both the old, vanished legendary world and the new, eager, analytic world of to-day. Tagore's descriptions of the forest-hermitage, of the Brahmin student's life, and of the sorrow and brooding loneliness of the Rains, are in the line of Indian tradition. This alone will ensure for the poem a passage to the heart of all India. For India has a common tradition; and, when Debjāni waters her creepers and Kach runs to perform the task for her, every Indian will recognize the reminiscence of Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, as the poet intended he should. Similarly, he will not miss the reference to

## INTRODUCTION

the *Meghadūta* (pp. 33-34). The house of the Demons' preceptor is a typical forest-hermitage and school, such as Tagore himself has established at Sāntiniketan. But the handling of the theme is finely modern, as well as traditional. In the *Mahābhārata* Kach is held up as a conqueror, because he controlled himself and withstood a woman's prayers. Tagore has given the story an extraordinary quickening of dramatic and human interest. Our modern world is interested in psychology, especially the psychology of a man and woman facing each other. The poet has boldly thrown all his sympathies on the woman's side, a fact which some of his Bengali readers have taken amiss, as Athenian readers probably took amiss Euripides' presentment of Alkestis and Admetus. Some of Kach's replies touch a height of extreme caddishness—the

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

insult of his praise (p. 38), his smug assumption of disinterestedness (p. 40), his summing up of the boundless hospitality he had received as his long toil in this "City of the Daityas" (p. 38), or his last suggestion that he forgives her and wishes her happiness. There is a veiled impudence in his speeches all through, except in that lyrical interchange between him and Debjāni, in their reminiscence of their first meeting—a passage whose great loveliness serves a dramatic purpose, in heightening the betrayal that is to follow and in practically convicting Kach out of his own words. The studied restraint of the two lines with which he takes his departure are the cruellest stab of all—when the perpetrator of the wrong gives himself such a halo of generous readiness to overlook Debjāni's wild words.

The poem's weakness will be felt to be

## INTRODUCTION

the 'curse' itself. The poet's explanation to me was that, since Kach had fairly won his knowledge with hard toil, its fruits could not be entirely taken from him; but that, since he took it without love, it must remain useless to himself. This explanation the poet has tilted into the text of his own English translation<sup>1</sup> in Debjāni's words: "*For lack of love* may it ever remain as foreign to your life as the cold stars are to the unespoused darkness of virgin Night!"—a sentence which has no correspondence in the Bengali text. We may well feel that this explanation is an afterthought of his allegorizing mind of to-day. I, at any rate, have no doubt that when he wrote *The Curse at Farewell* it was the sheer dramatic interest of the situation that gripped him, and no didactic purpose. The 'curse' is a bad anticlimax to

<sup>1</sup> *The Fugitive and other Poems.*

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

the burning words and moving story. The poet's real line of defence is that he was bound by his authority, the *Mahābhārata* story which ends with this 'curse.' But he has handled that story so freely and to such immense advantage, shedding its childishness and slight grossness, and making a natural, human narrative of Kach's sojourn, that he could, one thinks, have changed the conclusion also.

Rabindranath Tagore's work has been so long before the outer world that he should now be treated seriously as a writer, and studied in foreign countries as any other first-class poet is. His own versions published as *Gitanjali* and *Chitra* must stand for their intrinsic beauty and essential faithfulness. But the rest of his work would gain by reissue in chronological order, with accurate representation of what his own original actually says, and

## INTRODUCTION

with a minimum of notes. At present he has no notes, and often slurs over difficulties by rendering Indian thought and mythology as if they were colourless imitations of Western thought and mythology. Thus, Kāmadeva becomes Cupid, calling up one cannot say what pictures of late Latin triviality and Elizabethan conceits; the Indian *kokil* becomes the cuckoo, a bird it recalls in appearance only and certainly not in voice, thus misleading readers to whom the cuckoo is so much "a wandering voice." In my version of *The Curse at Farewell*, if I have used such a word as 'nymphs,' I have made amends by a note.

To get as close as possible to the original I have, in the poem's text, spelled Veṇumati, Āśādha, Samvaraṇa, and Bṛhaspati, as well as Kacha and Devayāṇi, as they are pronounced in Bengali, as distinguished

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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from Sanskrit. For the Notes and Source of the Plot I have kept the transliteration to which scholars are accustomed.

My thanks are due to Messrs Macmillan and Co., Ltd., for permission to publish my translation ; and to Dr James Morrison, Librarian of the Indian Institute, for advice.

EDWARD THOMPSON

COURTESY

ISLIP, OXON

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
THE CURSE AT FAREWELL	17
NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION AND TRANS- LITERATION	49
NOTES	51
SOURCE OF THE PLOT	55



# THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

*For notes see p. 51.*

[*Kach, at the conclusion of a thousand years of study in the forest-hermitage of Šukra, Preceptor of the Daityas, bids farewell to Debjānī, Šukra's daughter, and asks for her blessing on the knowledge he has won.]*

## KACH

Debjānī, bid your servant now return  
To the Gods' world. I finish my sojourn  
In my preceptor's house to-day. Then  
give  
Your benediction<sup>1</sup>— let my knowledge  
live  
A jewel-brightness in my deepest breast,  
As burns the sun on sacred Meru's<sup>2</sup> crest,  
With glory unquenchable.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

DEBJĀNĪ

Your vows are done;  
The hard-got knowledge from your master  
won;  
Your difficult penance of a thousand years  
Fulfilled. Yet think if no desire appears,  
No wish, however slight.

KACH

Nothing at all.

DEBJĀNĪ

Nothing? Yet look once more. Let your  
glance fall  
To the hid depths—plunge in, and search.  
Be sure,  
If anywhere, if any wish endure,  
"Twill sting like *kusa*-grass,<sup>1</sup> whose barb  
unseen,  
Though imperceptible, is piercing-keen.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

### KACH

My life is crowned. No lack, no poverty  
In this auspicious hour remains to me.

### DEBJĀNĪ

O in the three worlds<sup>1</sup> fortunate indeed!  
Your task achieved, to Indra's<sup>2</sup> kingdom  
speed,  
Bearing aloft a nodding crest of praise!  
The shouts of joy will swell in heaven's  
ways,  
The conch<sup>3</sup> in ravishing tumult welcome  
sing,  
The beauteous goddesses in showers will  
fling  
Sprays from the unfading groves of Para-  
disc.<sup>4</sup>  
Along the heavenly roads, with low, sweet  
cries<sup>5</sup>  
The nymphs<sup>6</sup> will hail you.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Ah, in deep distress,  
Bowed with your heavy tasks, in loneliness,  
In grief of exile, Brahmin, passed away  
Your time with us. But was there no one,  
say,  
The thought of whom would make your  
exile light  
And fill the house with joy? Far as we  
might,  
We honoured you, our guest, 'neath this  
poor roof,  
We gave our all. Ev'n so, your mind aloof  
Asked, "Where shall I the bliss of heaven  
obtain?  
Where see the laughing countenances  
again  
Of heaven's coquettes?" My earnest hope  
is this,  
That, now returning to your realm of  
bliss,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

What faults our hospitality has shown  
You will forget.

KACH

With gracious smile and tone  
All friendly, lady, bid your slave farewell.<sup>1</sup>

DEBJĀNĪ

With smile? Alas, this is not where they  
dwell,  
Your citizens of heaven! As in the flower  
A worm, friend, here a thirst from hour to  
hour  
Wakes in the heart; desire round the  
desired  
Hovers and turns, as the black bee untired,  
Rejected oft, to the shut lotus flies.  
When happiness is fled, here memory sighs,  
Sitting within an empty room alone.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Here smiles are not the cheap things you  
have known.

But go—you are wasting time, of course !  
Yes, go !

Your goddesses, my friend, impatient grow.  
What, you are off ! A word, and all is  
done !

And thus, after a thousand years have gone,  
Farewell !

### KACH

Debjānī, what have I done wrong ?

### DEBJĀNĪ

Ah me ! These lovely groves have through  
a long

Millennium thrown for you their grateful  
shade,

Their murmuring leaves and birds have  
music made.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Yet you leave all to-day without a pang !  
The trees in cloudy sorrow darker hang ;  
As if some grief across their spirit passed,  
To-day a deeper dusk the forests cast ;  
The wind wails, and the dry leaves whir  
to earth.

You only with a happy face of mirth  
Go, like a joyful dream when night is o'er.

### KACH

Debjānī, I shall cherish evermore  
These forests as my mother-country ;  
here  
My life had second birth. I will revere  
Their memory lovingly.

### DEBJĀNĪ

This banian's boughs  
Sheltered you daily, pasturing your cows '  
Or in the noon asleep. As for a guest,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

It spread above your wearied limbs at rest  
A hospitable shade, and on your eyes  
Rained happy dreams, fanning with gentle  
sighs.

Ah, comrade, for the last time sit, and old  
Communion with its proved affection  
hold !

But one half-hour ! No loss to heaven will  
fall.

### KACH

Fresh in my mind in this last hour are all  
These constant friends. New nets of love  
they weave

In eager yearning, binding, as I leave,  
With beauty that till now I never knew,—  
Their last appeal. O Forest-King, to you  
I humbly bow, to you the friend of those  
That seek your shelter. Where you inter-  
pose

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

A cover, travellers, till the fierce noon pass,  
Shall rest; students (how oft !), couched  
on your grass,

Like me, amid your lonely shadows great,  
Lulled by the insect-hum, shall meditate.

The *rishis*<sup>1</sup> sons, after their morning dip,  
Shall hang to dry their dress of bark<sup>2</sup> adrip  
Upon your branches; herd-boys in deep  
noon

Shall play beneath your boughs. Oh,  
grant this boon !

With these remember your old comrade,  
me !

## DEBJĀNĪ

Recall our sacrificial cow,<sup>3</sup> for she  
Gave you to drink her milk, like nectar;  
now

Do not through pride neglect this holy  
cow.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

### KACH

Nectar from nectar was her milk! Her  
sight

Destroyed all sin—peaceful, most snowy-  
white,

Milk-charged, a mother-form! Oh, I aver,  
Weariness, hunger, thirst, in care of her  
I have forgot; with her long days have  
spent

Beside the river, fringed with waving bent.  
Deep in the grove I lay; on the low bank  
The lush, sweet grass, boundless, abund-  
ant, rank,

She cropped at will, then to the shade  
would go,

Her body with repletion drowsed and slow,  
There couched in the deep grass to  
ruminate

The afternoon away. At whiles her great

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Eyes filled with peaceful gratitude she'd  
raise,

Licking me, as she looked with thankful  
gaze.

Never shall I forget that calm, cool sight—  
That body silky-sleek, fat, smooth, and  
white.

## DEBJĀNĪ

And Benumati<sup>1</sup> too, our singing river,  
Remember.

## KACH

How shall I forget her ever?  
Through many a flowery copse, with  
joyous, sweet,  
Low-murmured tune, speeding on rapid  
feet,  
As though a woman of the village, thou  
Hast carried service, on thy holy vow

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Ever intent, O thou my exile's dear  
Companion, Benumatī !

DEBJĀNĪ

Ah, but here  
Was there no other comrade, friend, with  
you,  
Whose anxious mind no other effort knew,  
Through all its nights and days, but to  
beguile—  
Ah, vain, vain hope!—the grief of your  
exile?

KACH

Into the web of all my days her name  
Is woven.

DEBJĀNĪ

I can see you as you came  
On that first day—a Brahmin boy, a bright  
New dawn, your golden body in cool light

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

O'ershowered, your throat with young  
buds garlanded,  
In robe of silk, your forehead touched with  
red  
Of sandal-paste. A frank and winning  
smile  
Played in your eyes. There in a forest-  
aisle,  
You stood in flowers—

### KACH

And you, your body swathed  
In nets of long, wet tresses, newly bathed,  
I saw—the faultless, white-limbed Dawn-  
Queen—stand,  
A glory-flooded form, alone. Your hand  
A basket filled with buds of worship  
bore.  
“ Goddess,’ these flowers ”—I humbly  
'gan implore—

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Let your slave carry for you—'tis a task  
Becomes you ill."

### DEBJĀNĪ

Then wondering did I ask,  
" Who are you? " Humbly still you said,  
" I wait,  
The son of Brihaspati, at your gate,  
To be your father's pupil."

### KACH

Oh, my doubt  
Was strong, the Daityas' Teacher would  
cast out  
The Brahmin boy from heaven !

### DEBJĀNĪ

I solved that dread !  
" Father, I seek a boon," laughing I  
said.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

His hand upon my brow, he then replied  
In loving tones, seating me at his side,  
" Nothing there is to you I can deny."  
" The son of Brihaspati," answered I,  
" Stands at your door, and begs admittance  
here,  
To learn from you." Ah me ! this many a  
year  
Has fled since then, though in my memory  
yet  
It seems the morning of a day scarce  
set !

### KACH

Me in their rage the Daityas thrice have  
slain,  
But you, dear lady, brought to life again.<sup>1</sup>  
The memory of your gracious kindness  
still  
My heart with endless gratitude shall fill.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

DEBJĀNĪ

Gratitude ! Oh, forget ! I shall not mind !  
Perish my ' service ' ! Did I look to find  
Punctual return, a gift to answer debt ?  
But lives no happy memory with you  
yet ?

If ever rang, on any of your days,  
Within, without, a joyful strain of praise ;  
If ever, as the hour of dusk descended  
On Benumati's brink, and study ended,  
You felt, amid the flowery copse alone,  
Your being tremble with a thrill unknown ;  
If from the blossoming grove ev'n to the  
sky  
Of twilight swelled your heart's excite-  
ment high,  
Like a flower-fragrance poured, that happy  
mood  
Remember ! Never talk of gratitude !

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

Playmate,<sup>1</sup> if there was one whose singing,  
say,  
Rejoiced you; or, on such and such a  
day,  
One passed perchance, the flutter of whose  
dress  
Troubled your mind with waves of happi-  
ness—  
Your heart was pleased, your eyes were  
satisfied—  
Oh, let that glimpse still beautiful abide !  
Oh, when your leisure falls, remember  
this,  
There, in your home of paradisal bliss !  
How oft within this wood the circling rim  
Of the horizon suddenly grew dim  
With Āshār's<sup>2</sup> blue, shagged tresses—the  
dense troop,  
The new clouds of the cool, green Rains,  
would swoop,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

And then the heart, through the long,  
workless day,  
Sick with imagination, fainting lay,  
While fell the steady showers unceasingly !  
Ah, then (how oft !) youth's ardour sud-  
denly,  
Beating with eager waves, the unfettered,  
strong  
Current of Spring, has swept ! A clamor-  
ous song  
Has filled the forest-glades from side to  
side,  
Laving flower, leaf, and vine, a billowy  
tide  
Of exultation ! Think how many dawns,  
How many new-moon nights, flooding the  
lawns  
With flowery incense charging the dark air,  
How many full-moon skies with your life's  
care

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

And happiness have mingled here, have  
passed

Into its web! Among all these at last  
Lives not one dawn, one eve, one mad  
delight

Of your wild, leaping heart? Never a night  
Drowsed with intoxication? Not a joy?  
No face deep-limned that time shall not  
destroy,

Its picture painted on the mind's bright wall  
For evermore? My 'service'! Is that all?  
Nothing that wakens love? No thoughts  
that glow?

## KACH

Playmate, these sacred depths are not for  
show.

That which lies far within, whose pulse I  
feel

One with my blood, ah, how shall I reveal?

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

DEBJĀNĪ

Playmate, your heart's hid secret I have  
known

How often, by the quick gleam of my  
own!

Have guessed your meaning by a lightning-  
flash,

Have read your eyes in lifting of a lash!

Now shall you see how bold a woman's  
mind!

Stay with us, stay! Go not. You will not  
find

Happiness in your pomp of praise. We  
two

On Benumati's brink our ever-new  
Heavens will create, and through the shady  
grove

With tranquil, happy hearts alone will  
rove,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

The world forgetting. Friend, you see I  
know  
Your secret!

KACH

No, Debjānī, no! Not so.

DEBJĀNĪ

No? Vain pretence! Your heart I never  
read?  
You do not know love rules it? Ev'n  
when dead,  
The flower o'erblown clings to its withered  
spray—  
But where has gone the scent? Friend,  
many a day,  
Ev'n as you raised your head, or looked,  
or heard  
My voice, your heart through all your body  
stirred

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

Quick tremors—so a shaken diamond's  
light

Glances! And this, you think, escaped my  
sight?

You are found out, friend! Never shall you  
break

These cords that evermore my captive  
make!

Indra is not your Indra!

### KACH

Lovely Face,<sup>1</sup>  
Through a millennium, in this alien place,  
This City of the Daityas, toiled I then  
For this?

### DEBJĀNĪ

Why not? Is't but for knowledge men  
Suffer and strive? For woman's love has  
none

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

Endured hard penance? Full in the fierce sun

A bitter lot Sambaran<sup>1</sup> bore, to gaze,  
Foodless, unwinking, in the fiery blaze,  
Ere he won Tapati. Alas, but here  
Is love so cheap, and knowledge only dear?

A thousand years of pain have passed, and lo!

The treasure that is yours you do not know?

Knowledge is there, I here; your swift eyes flit

In troubled eagerness from me to it,  
From it to me. Your mind with anxious thought

Its secret worship to us both has brought.  
Now in one day we come, yours to refuse  
Or take. We stand together. Look, and choose,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

With eyes wide-opened. Frankly bold,  
confess :

" Debjāni, knowledge is not happiness,  
And fame is not ; my life in you alone  
Its purpose sees, in you incarnate shown,  
And I embrace it." Shame nor loss, be  
sure,

Will come from this. Though penance  
hard endure

A thousand years, a woman's heart at end  
Is treasure that repays all travail, friend.

### KACH

Solemnly to the assembled gods I swore  
That, with the mighty words that can  
restore

The dead to life, I would return ; that  
vow

Was ever quick within my mind. And  
now

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

My promise is fulfilled, my life is crowned,  
After so long. No selfish wish is found  
Within my heart to-day.

DEBJĀNĪ

Measureless liar !  
Accursèd ! What, you came with this  
desire,  
For learning only, to your teacher's roof ?  
Sat you with steadfast eyes, absorbed,  
aloof,  
Fixed on your books ? Did nought else  
claim your care ?  
Why then, forsaking study, did you fare  
From copse to copse, and flowers in gar-  
lands thread,  
And why with laughter place them on the  
head  
Of this unlearnèd maid ? Come, tell me  
now,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

Was this a student's work? This your  
stern vow?

When, with my empty basket in my  
hand,

Laughingly I would come at dawn, and  
stand

Beside you as you read, why would you  
fling

Your books aside to greet me, worshipping  
With dew-drenched flowers full-blown?

Or, when I went

Watering our creepers, seeing me tired and  
spent

In the hot afternoon, why would you  
take

My pitcher from me? Why would you  
forsake

Your precious books to pet my fawn? Oh,  
why,

When evening on the river silently

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

Came darkening down, like the long,  
kindly shade

Over love-drooping eyes by eyelids made,

Why would you by the water to me sing

•Songs learnt in heaven? Why did you do  
this thing—

Coming for knowledge steal my heart the  
while,

Snaring it with your nets of heavenly guile?

I understand now! Conquering me, your  
way

You opened to my father's heart—to-day  
Back you return triumphant. But your  
mood

Is gracious—you will give me gratitude!  
At a king's gate so some petitioner,  
His boon achieved, will generously confer  
A coin or two, will slip some trivial alms,  
Departing, in the expectant porter's palms,<sup>1</sup>  
Being pleased, good man!

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

---

KACH

How would it bring you bliss,  
Proud woman, if you knew the truth of  
this?

The Judge<sup>1</sup> knows that I practised no  
deceit;

And if, in happiness that veiled no cheat,  
In frank and open joy to you I bent  
My worship, bitter is my punishment.

What thought was in my mind it matters  
not;

Knowledge by which no profit can be got  
By any in the three worlds, mine alone,  
My own peculiar grief—if that be known,  
What good can come? 'Tis vain to argue  
now

Whether I love or not; my neck I bow  
Beneath my destined task. Heaven's hours  
may drag

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

In most unheavenly wise; and, as a stag  
Sore-wounded, so my suffering heart may  
turn

To some far forest-glade for which I yearn.  
My burnt-out life in all its work may  
know

A never-dying thirst—yet must I go  
Back to my joyless home of heaven, to  
give

The Gods this lorc by which the dead  
relive.

My life in this their new divinity  
Will get fulfilment absolute—for me,

I put all joy aside before my task.

Debjānī, I have wronged you. But I ask  
Forgiveness.

## DEBJĀNĪ

In what corner of my mind,  
Brahmin, forgiveness will you ever find?

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

My woman's heart hard as the thunder-stone

You have made; and now you vanish to your own,

Your heaven, your work, your glory! All distress,

All pain, you fling afar in this access

Of leaping joy—defeated, finished now!

But what is *my* work, what *my* wondrous vow?

And what to *my* maimed, useless life is left?

What glory? In this wood to sit, bereft  
Of friend and fortune, crushed, with down-cast face,

Companionless—to see in every place,  
Wherc'er I look, the pricking, piercing  
brake

Of memory's thousand thorns! And  
Shame, the snake,

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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Will bite my hidden breast repeatedly !  
Fie on you, whencesoe'er you came, and be  
Accursèd, selfish traveller ! Here, in shade  
Of my life's wood you sat, and pastime  
made—

To waste a little leisure tore ashred  
The petals of my happiness, to thread  
A playful garland—then, in great disdain,  
Departing, snap in two the thin, poor  
chain,

And toss it down ! My life's whole glory  
there

Lies rolled in dust. Then go ! But, going,  
bear

My curse with you—the knowledge for  
whose sake

You scorn me, never, never shali you make  
Your own ! Mechanic porter, you shall  
bring

This gift to others, knowing it a thing

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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You may not use. Never shall you employ  
The art you teach—shall give, but not  
enjoy!

KACH

I have chosen, lady. May you, happy yet,  
In your great splendour all distress forget!<sup>1</sup>

## NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSLITERATION

THE three *s*'s, palatal, dental, and cerebral, are distinguished thus : *s*, *s*, *ś*. The cerebral *n*, *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh* are distinguished from the dentals by dots, thus : *ñ*, *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh*.

Bengali differs from Sanskrit in pronouncing all three *s*'s and both *n*'s alike ; it makes the Sanskrit *v* into *b*, and *y* into *j* ; and it often drops *a*, the included vowel which every consonant carries unless a different vowel supervenes, and so makes *Kacha* into *Kach*, *Meghadūta* into *Meghdūt*, and *Devayānī* into *Debjānī*.

In Sanskrit *a* is pronounced like the *u* in *but*, but in Bengali like a short (but not too short) *o*—e.g., *Ravīndranātha* is pronounced 'Robindronāth.' In both languages *ā* is pronounced like the *a* in *father*, *i* as *ee*, *u* as *oo*, *e* like *a* in *mane*. The vowel *r*, which resembles the French *r*, is represented by *r*, to distinguish it from the consonant *r*.

Bengali makes no distinction in pronunciation between *i* and *ī*, *u* and *ū*.



## NOTES

*The numbers refer to page and note respectively, the heavy figure indicating the page, the ordinary figure the note on the page.*

17. 1. Auspicious words at farewell were necessary to make his work successful.

17. 2. Mount Meru, the North Pole, the home of the Gods, and the mythological Mount of Sunrise.

18. 1. The sacred grass used in sacrifices and funeral ceremonies.

19. 1. The three worlds are Heaven—the Abode of the Gods, Earth—the Abode of Mortals, and the Atmosphere.

19. 2. Indra, in the Puranic or post-Vedic mythology, is represented as reigning in Meru, with the Gods as his court.

19. 3. The conch is used on all auspicious occasions.

19. 4. Literally, 'sprays of *mandara*-blossoms.' The *mandara* is one of the five sacred trees of paradisal groves.

19. 5. The nymphs will greet you with low cries of *ulu*, the sound made by Hindu women on auspicious occasions.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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19. 6. 'Nymphs'—heavenly dancers and singers (*apsaras* and *kinnari*).

21. 1. Debjānī is spoiling his departure with inauspicious words.

23. 1. It was part of the duty of a *brahmachārī* (student) to tend his teacher's cows. The teacher accepted him as a son, and fed and taught him free• of charge.

25. 1. *Rṣi*, 'sage,' may now be regarded as anglicized into *rishi*.

25. 2. The traditional dress of ascetics and students of the forest-schools, as of Rāma in his exile, was made of bark.

25. 3. 'Sacrificial cow'—cow whose milk was used in sacrifices. In this grave laudation of the cow the poet is in the line of tradition ; but the reader will feel a touch of half-mockery, I think.

27. 1. 'Benumati' means 'Reedy' River ; forested with bamboos.

29. 1. *Devī*—'goddess'—is the title used in addressing a Brahmin lady. In this one place I have given Debjānī the benefit of its literal meaning ; elsewhere it is translated as 'lady.'

31. 1. By the power of her father's magic art. See "Source of the Plot."

33. 1. 'Playmate'—*sakha*, the name used by the Vaiṣṇava poets when Rādhā addresses her lover Krishna (Kṛṣṇa). Literally, 'companion.'

## NOTES

Its connotation, from its connexion with Krishna's sports and amours, is closer than that of our 'companion.' Kach replies to Debjānī with the feminine, *sakhī*.

33. 2. Āśādha, the first month of the Rains, mid-June to mid-July. I have given a spelling which more or less corresponds to its Bengali pronunciation. The Rains is the season which Kālidāsa (in his *Cloud-Messenger*) and the Vaiṣṇava poets have associated with the thought of lovers languishing in separation from each other. It is a time when the mind broods, since outdoor work is impossible, and the weather induces a gentle melancholy. Kach brooded over the heaven he had forsaken.

38. 1. Literally, 'Pure, smiling Face'—a full recognition of Debjānī's loveliness, while he asks contemptuously if she thinks he really worked for the sake of winning that.

39. 1. Samvarāṇa was a king of the Solar Dynasty; Tapati was the daughter of the Sun. Her name means 'She who is won by penance.' The Solar Dynasty were sons of the Sun-god, who often descended to earth and formed alliances. Samvarāṇa passed a thousand years of penance to win Tapati.

43. 1. 'Palms' is not a tag to rhyme with 'alms.' The porter's palms would be together expectantly.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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44. 1. Dharma—‘Righteousness,’ the Judge of the dead. And, three lines farther on, Kach says, “The Creator has punished me.”

47. 1. ‘Mechanic porter,’ of course, is Shakespeare’s phrase (*Henry V*, I, ii, l. 200).

84. 1. That is, may she make a fortunate marriage elsewhere !

## SOURCE OF THE PLOT

THESE are the relevant extracts from the *Mahābhārata* :

“ Between the Celestials and the Asuras <sup>1</sup> there happened frequent encounters of yore for the sovereignty of the three worlds, with everything in them. The Gods, then, from desire of victory installed the son of Angiras <sup>2</sup> as their priest to conduct their sacrifices ; while their opponents installed the learned Uśana <sup>3</sup> as their priest for the same purpose. And between those two learned Brāhmaṇas <sup>4</sup> there was always much boastful rivalry. Those Dānavas <sup>5</sup> assembled for encounter that were slain by the Gods were all revived by Kāvya,<sup>6</sup> by aid of the power of his knowledge. And then, starting again into life, these fought with the Gods. The Asuras also slew on the field of battle many of the Celestials. But the open-minded Brhaspati could not revive them, because he knew not the science called *Sañjīvani*,<sup>7</sup> which Kāvya, endued with great energy, knew so well. And the Gods were,

<sup>1</sup> Demons or Titans.

<sup>2</sup> One of the seven chief Rishis. Brhaspati was his son.

<sup>3</sup> Sukra.

<sup>4</sup> Brahmins.

<sup>5</sup> Another name for the Daityas.

<sup>6</sup> Son of Kavi, ‘the Poet’ (Sukra).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Life-giving.’

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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Śukra summoned Kacha. And, summoned by his preceptor, Kacha appeared before him in gladness of heart, tearing by virtue of his preceptor's science the bodies of the wolves. And, asked about the cause of his delay, he thus spoke unto Bhārgava's<sup>1</sup> daughter. Indeed, asked by that Brāhmaṇa's daughter, he told her, 'I was dead. O thou of pure manners, bearing the sacrificial fuel, *kuśa*-grass and logs of wood, I was coming toward our abode. I had sat under a banian-tree. The kine also, having been gathered together, were staying under the shade of that same banian. The Asuras, beholding me, asked, "Who art thou?" They heard me answer, "I am the son of Brhaspati." As soon as I had said this, the Dānavas slew me, and, hacking my body into pieces, gave my remains to jackals and wolves. And they then went to their homes in gladness of heart.' . . .

"On another occasion, asked by Devayāṇī, the Brāhmaṇa Kacha went into the woods. And, as he was roving about gathering flowers, the Dānavas beheld him. They again slew him, and, pounding him into paste, they mixed it with the waters of the ocean. Finding him late, the maiden again represented the matter unto her father. And, summoned again by the Brāhmaṇa with the aid of his science, Kacha, appearing before him, told everything as it had happened. Then, slaying

<sup>1</sup> Śukra.

## SOURCE OF THE PLOT

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him for the third time and burning him and reducing him to ashes, the Asuras gave those ashes to the preceptor himself, mixing them with his wine. And Devayānī again spoke unto her father, saying, 'O father, Kacha hath been sent to gather flowers. But he is not to be seen. It is plain he hath been lost or dead. I tell thee truly, I would not live without him.'

"Sukra, hearing this, said, 'O daughter, the son of Bṛhaspati hath gone to the region of the dead. Though revived by my science, he is thus slain frequently. What, indeed, am I to do? O Devayānī, do not grieve, do not cry. One like thee should not grieve for one that is mortal. Indeed, thou art, O daughter, in consequence of my prowess, worshipped thrice a day, during the ordained hours of prayer, by Brahma, Brāhmaṇas, the Gods with Indra, the Vasus,<sup>1</sup> the Aśvinas,<sup>2</sup> the Asuras; in fact, by the whole universe. It is impossible to keep him alive, for, revived by me, he is as often killed.' To all this Devayānī replied, 'Why shall I, O father, not grieve for him whose grandfather is old Angiras himself, whose father is Bṛhaspati—that ocean of ascetic merit, who is the grandson of a Rishi and the son also of a Rishi? He himself too was a *brahmachārī*, and an ascetic, always wakeful and skilled in everything. I will

<sup>1</sup> A class of eight demigods.

<sup>2</sup> The Heavenly Horsemen; the Castor and Pollux of Indian mythology.

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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starve and follow the way Kacha hath gone. The handsome Kacha is, O father, dear unto me.'

" . . . Šukra, urged by Devayānī, began to summon Kacha, who had entered the jaws of death. But Kacha, summoned with the aid of science and afraid at the consequences to his preceptor, feebly replied from within the stomach of his preceptor. And Kacha said, 'Be gracious unto me, O Lord ! I am Kacha that worshippeth thee. Behave unto me as to thine own dearly loved son.' . . . Šukra said, 'O daughter, what good can I do to thee ? It is with my death that Kacha can have back his life. O Devayānī, Kacha is even within me. There is no other way of his coming out except by ripping open my stomach.' Devayānī replied, 'Both evils shall, like fire, burn me. The death of Kacha and thine own death too are to me as one. The death of Kacha would deprive me of life. If thou also diest I shall not be able to bear life.' Then Šukra said, 'O son of Bṛhaspati, thou art, indeed, one already crowned with success, because Devayānī regardeth thee so well. Accept now the science that I will to-day impart to thee, if indeed thou art not Indra in the form of Kacha. None can come out of my stomach with life. A Brāhmaṇa, however, must not be slain. Therefore accept thou the science I impart to thee. Start thou into life as my son. And, possessed of the knowledge, having received it from me and revived by me, look thou that

## SOURCE OF THE PLOT

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coming out of my body thou mayest have in view what gratitude dictateth.'

"Receiving then the science imparted to him by his preceptor, ripping open his stomach the handsome Brâhmaṇa Kacha came out like the moon at evening in the fifteenth day of the lighted fortnight. And, beholding the remains of his preceptor, Kacha revived him with the aid of the science he had received. . . .

"The learned Śukra, having been deceived while under wine, and remembering the total loss of consciousness that is one of the terrible consequences of drink, and beholding too before him the handsome Kacha whom he had, in a state of unconsciousness, drunk with his wine, then thought of effecting a reform in the manners of the Brâhmaṇas. The high-souled Uśana, rising up from the ground, in anger then spoke as follows : 'That wretched Brâhmaṇa who from this day will, being unable to resist the temptation, drink wine, shall be regarded as having lost his virtue, shall be reckoned to have committed the sin of slaying a Brâhmaṇa, shall be hated both in this and the other world. I set this limit to the conduct and dignity of Brâhmaṇas everywhere. Let the honest, let Brâhmaṇas, let those regardful of their superiors, let the Gods, let the three worlds listen !' Having said these words, that high-souled one, that ascetic of ascetics, then summoning the Dânavas who had been deprived by fate of their good sense told

## THE CURSE AT FAREWELL

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of my preceptor, and not because thou hast any fault. Nor hath my preceptor in this respect issued any command. Curse me if it please thee! I have told thee what the behaviour should be of Rishis. I do not deserve thy curse, O Devayāni ! But yet hast thou cursed me. Thou hast acted under the influence of passion, and not from a sense of duty. Therefore thy desire shall not be fulfilled. No Rishi's son shall ever accept thy hand in marriage. Thou hast said that my knowledge shall not bear fruit. Let it be so. But in him it shall bear fruit to whom I shall impart it.'

"That first of Brāhmaṇas, Kacha, having said so unto Devayāni, speedily wended unto the abode of the chief of the Celestials. And, beholding him arrived, the Celestials, with Indra at their head, having first worshipped, spoke unto him as follows : 'Thou hast indeed performed an act of great good for us. Wonderful hath been thy achievement ! Thy fame shall never die. And thou shalt be a sharer with us in sacrificial offerings.'"—*Mahābhārata, Adi Parva, Section LXXVII.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From "The *Mahābhārata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyāsa*, translated into English prose ; published and distributed chiefly gratis by Protap Chandra Roy (Calcutta : Bharata Press, No. 367 Upper Chitpore Road ; 1884)." I have corrected the transliteration of proper names and a few mistakes in English.





